

# Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program School Year 2021-22 (July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022)

This guidance helps menu planners meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern requirements for grades K-12 (including the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP) and encourage student selections of reimbursable meals with offer versus serve (OVS). The NSLP meal patterns are available on the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



**Meal pattern:** All lunch menus must meet minimum daily and weekly requirements. The weekly maximums for the grains component and meat/meat alternates component are not required, but provide a planning tool to offer balanced meals that meet the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. For more information, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and refer to the CSDE's resource, [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#).



**Milk:** Allowable types of milk include unflavored low-fat (1%) milk and unflavored or flavored fat-free milk. Flavored low-fat milk is allowed through December 3, 2021. School food authorities (SFAs) must offer at least 1 cup daily for all grades and must include a variety (at least two different choices) of milk. At least one choice must be unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk.



**Fruits:** The fruits component includes fresh, frozen, and dried fruit; canned fruit in juice, water, or light syrup; and pasteurized 100 percent full-strength fruit juice. SFAs must offer at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 1 cup daily for grades 9-12. All fruits credit based on volume except dried fruits, which credit as twice the volume served. For example,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of raisins or dried apricots credits as  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the fruits component. A serving of canned fruit may include the juice in which it is packed. For more information, visit the "[Fruits Component for Grades K-12](#)" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



**Vegetables:** The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables, and pasteurized 100 percent full-strength vegetable juice. SFAs must offer at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 1 cup daily for grades 9-12. All vegetables credit based on volume except raw leafy greens (such as spinach and lettuce), which credit as half the volume served. For example, 1 cup of lettuce credits as  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the vegetables component. The meal pattern serving size refers to the amount of vegetables without added liquid, such as the water in canned corn or the sauce in baked beans. Menus must include minimum weekly amounts of five vegetable subgroups: dark green, red/orange, beans/peas (legumes), starchy, and other. For more information, refer to the

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CSDE's resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the NSLP](#); and visit the "Vegetables Component for Grades K-12" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



**Juice:** Fruit and vegetable juice must be pasteurized 100 percent full-strength juice. Fruit juice cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit offerings and vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetable offerings. For example, if the weekly lunch menu for grades 6-8 includes 2½ cups of fruit, fruit juice cannot exceed 1¼ cups. The juice limit applies all sources of 100 percent juice served at lunch during the week, including 100 percent juice, frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice, pureed fruits and vegetables in fruit/vegetable smoothies, and juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice (unless the canned fruit is drained). For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Crediting Juice for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#) and [Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#).



**Grains:** SFAs must offer at least 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 2 oz eq daily for grades 9-12. Over the week, five-day menus must include at least 8 oz eq for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 10 oz eq for grades 9-12. Seven-day menus must include at least 11 oz eq for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 14 oz eq for grades 9-12. All grains must be WGR. WGR foods contain at least 50 percent whole grains, any remaining grains are enriched, and any noncreditable grains are less than 2 percent (¼ ounce equivalent) of the product formula. WGR foods include 100 percent whole grains, which are the most nutritious choices. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#), [Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP](#), and [Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#); and visit the "Grains Component for Grades K-12" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



**Dietary specifications:** Lunch menus must meet the weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fat, and sodium indicated in the NSLP meal pattern. In addition, the nutrition label or manufacturer specifications for all foods and ingredients used in school meals must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving. For information on the dietary specifications, refer to section 6 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#). SFAs should be aware of product nutrition information and limit noncreditable foods. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Noncreditable Foods for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#).

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**Offer versus serve (OVS):** SFAs must offer all five components (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meat/meat alternates). Students must select at least three components, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum serving of at least two other components. Except for the fruits and vegetables components, amounts less than the minimum serving do not credit as a food component for OVS. For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals](#), and visit the CSDE's [OVS](#) webpage.



**Offering variety:** The language used on school menus and signs must indicate if choices are allowed. To offer variety, provide different choices and specify the number of items students can select. The lunch menu below provides an example.

Sample lunch menu (grades 9-12)					
Each lunch includes five components: milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates. Choose at least one fruit or vegetable and two other components.					
		Choose at least one serving (½ cup)			
	Milk		Fruits		Vegetables
					Meat/meat alternates and grains *
	Choose 1		Choose 1		Choose up to 2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low-fat (1%)</li> <li>Fat-free plain</li> <li>Fat-free chocolate</li> <li>Fat-free strawberry</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raisins</li> <li>Blueberries</li> <li>Green grapes</li> <li>Pineapple chunks</li> <li>Sliced peaches</li> <li>Banana</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carrot sticks</li> <li>Broccoli florets</li> <li>Spinach salad</li> <li>Seasoned corn</li> <li>Roasted potatoes</li> <li>Green beans</li> </ul>
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hamburger on whole-wheat bun</li> <li>Turkey whole-grain wrap</li> <li>Baked chicken with whole grain-rich corn bread</li> <li>Southwest chili with whole-grain roll</li> </ul>
* All entrees include grains and meat/meat alternates (two components).					



**Signage and communication:** SFAs must identify all foods that are part of reimbursable meals near or at the beginning of all serving lines, and on the serving line near each food component, as applicable. For example, if fruits are offered in ½-cup portions for grades 9-12, the serving line signage must indicate that students can select two choices. To ensure clear communication with students and staff about the NSLP meal pattern and OVS, SFAs must post daily lunch menus in all schools. Menus should clearly communicate all meal choices and what students can select. SFAs must also provide adequate training for school food service staff on the lunch meal pattern, including how to recognize reimbursable meals with OVS.

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## Resources

Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Grains Component in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Comparison\\_Grain\\_Crediting\\_SNP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Comparison_Grain_Crediting_SNP.pdf)

Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Milk Component in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Comparison\\_Milk\\_Requirements\\_SNP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Comparison_Milk_Requirements_SNP.pdf)

Crediting Summary Charts for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Crediting\\_Summary\\_Charts\\_SNP\\_Grades\\_K-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Crediting_Summary_Charts_SNP_Grades_K-12.pdf)

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 06-19: Summary of Federal and State Milk Requirements for the NSLP, SBP, SSO of the NSLP, ASP of the NSLP, and Special Milk Program (SMP):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Memos/OM2019/OM07-19.pdf>

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 07-19: Compliance Issues with the Vegetables and Fruits Components for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Memos/OM2019/OM07-19.pdf>

Fruits Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#Fruits>

Grains Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#Grains>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#MMA>

Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE website):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

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Menu Planning Resources for School Meals (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning>

Milk Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#Milk>

National School Lunch Program (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/National-School-Lunch-Program>

Noncreditable Foods for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Noncreditable\\_Foods\\_SNP\\_grades\\_K-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Noncreditable_Foods_SNP_grades_K-12.pdf)

Nutrition Standards for School Meals (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Offer-versus-Serve-for-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Resources for the School Meal Patterns (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Meal\\_Pattern/Resources\\_School\\_Meal\\_Patterns\\_grades\\_K-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Meal_Pattern/Resources_School_Meal_Patterns_grades_K-12.pdf)

Vegetables Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#Vegetables>

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For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and visit the CSDE's *Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs* webpages, or contact the *school nutrition programs staff* in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/MealPattern/Overview\\_Menu\\_Planning\\_NSLP\\_grades\\_K-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/MealPattern/Overview_Menu_Planning_NSLP_grades_K-12.pdf).

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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